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SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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THE PATERNAL GOVERNMENT OF GOD.

"After this manner, therefore, pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven."—Matt. vi. 9.

Who may say this prayer? Is it a prayer limited to the use of the sectarian, the elect? or is it universal? May it be employed by every one that desires to approach God? Is it His title? Does it, as far as anything can, set forth the true, the actual nature of God, to which our thoughts must address themselves? Have we a right to determine the government of God, the divine nature, and the providence of God, from a title such as this?

In our time, no subject is more in men's thoughts than the metes and bounds and the true nature of the Divine government under which we live, and by which we are being fashioned for the other and the higher life. It is a government which depends for its nature and efficacy upon the character of the Supreme Governor from whose will proceed laws.

To ascertain the true nature of God, and the true nature of the divine government over us, taxes men's curiosity—something better than that, their whole moral nature—just in proportion as they are developed, and grow strong.

When men are low, and lacking in sensibility, it seems little to them to throw themselves away; there is little to throw away: but when by culture and by divine grace men have unfolded the faculties of their souls, and the feeling power of true manhood, it becomes more and more a question of transcendent importance, "What shall become of us?" They cannot afford to make shipwreck of themselves.

This is a universal prayer. The oldest and the youngest, the best and the worst, the most cultured and developed, and the savage, just putting one foot before the other in his upward path, all may draw near to God by this sacred appellation.

SUNDAY MORNING, June 15, 1873. LESSON: Luke xv. HYMNS (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 132, 509, 617.

But, considering the imperfect conditions in which moral emotions and personal affections are developed in this life; how much belongs to us here by reason of our material structure; how much, therefore, is relative; how much falls out in the way of life from our weakness; how many of our actions are necessary, but are not typical of the highest forms of human actions,—considering all these things, have we a right to determine the divine nature by such a figure as that of fatherhood among men? That there is, in the life and necessary history of every parent a great deal that is to be thrown out, a great deal that cannot be employed as material by which to interpret the divine nature, all will admit; but the substantial nature of man—that is, his thinking nature, his affectional nature, and his moral nature—are alphabetic elements from which he can spell out something of the divine nature. To say that the moral endowments of men are not like the attributes of God in kind; to say that Deity differs from humanity in quality; to say that truth with us is a different thing from truth in God; to say that moral discriminations as made by men are different, not in purity and accuracy, but in kind, from moral discriminations as made by God; to say that thought-power in man differs from thought-power in God, not in degree, and not in scope, but in nature—to say these things is to prove that men have been deceived. We have been deceived in those only elements by which we can form a conception of God, if these are not true and valid rules or measures of interpretation.

I am commanded to be just; I am commanded to be perfect as God is perfect; and I attempt, taking the best actions of the best men in their best moods, under divine guidance, to bring myself under that which is just and perfect, and into all those thoughts and feelings and actions which I see exhibited in the highest specimens of my fellow-men; but if these are false models, unlike the divine nature, then I am beguiled, and I can neither interpret nor worship the divine nature aright. I throw my prayers into the darkness, under such circumstances. The Being that I fashion to myself may or may not be God, and the divine nature becomes a fiction which every man writes to suit himself.

What would be thought of a government that should impose a tax of so many dollars upon every man's property, and leave him to suppose that the measure of the tax was to be interpreted by the term *dollar*, until the time of payment came, when it should be found that the government had attached a different value to a dollar from that which was attached to it among the people?

What would be thought if a contract should be entered into with

the Government to furnish a certain quantity of timber for the navy, and when it came to be delivered, it should be found that the Government had a rule entirely different from the carpenter's rule by which men usually measure?

What would be thought if a contract should be made with the Government for a supply of stone, and iron, and copper, and lead, and wood, or any other articles, and when they came to be delivered, it should be found that the ideas of the Government were entirely different from the current ideas in regard to these things, and it should turn out that what was generally called stone was not stone, and iron was not iron, according to the interpretation of the Government?

What possible connection could be kept up with a government that should leave men to hold one idea, while itself acting upon another entirely different idea? We are told to love truth and righteousness, to seek for holiness, and to cultivate benevolent dispositions; but if those dispositions, the capacity for which God has implanted in us, are not correct interpretations of the quality of God's nature, then we are deceived, and the organic structure of truth and justice and honor cannot be understood among men as they are understood with God.

We admit that all human moral faculties act in a lower sphere, and under conditions of imperfection; but we assert that the essential quality of truth is the same among men and with God; that honor and rectitude and justice and love are substantially the same; that men can therefore argue from their own personal knowledge and experience; and that it is fair to argue from the fatherhood of men to the fatherhood of God, and from the government of the family to the divine government.

Nor do we need to stand alone upon our own inference. This very question is adjudicated by our Saviour in the seventh chapter of Matthew. He there says:

"Every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened [speaking of the intercourse of men's souls with God]. Or what man is there of you who, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?"

Then, as if meeting the objection that arose in men's minds, "Oh yes, but God is God," he says:

"If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more [in the same line, in the same direction, in the same development] shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?"

That is to say, the inferences which are derived in respect to the divine nature and government from the best developments of men

are legitimate, only the reality will transcend immeasurably all human conceptions. It will bring forth more glorious and more bountiful fruit than we are apt to suppose. It is safe to argue from the best developed fatherhood among men to the fatherhood of God, and from family government to the divine government.

We are not, however, to commit the error of transferring to the divine government everything that belongs to fatherhood among men, nor everything that belongs to human government in its rude and imperfect execution.

Let us look a little at what a true government includes. Leaving out all enfeeblements and imperfections, and taking the ideal of a well-ordered family government, I aver, first, that the children are connected to the parents by a like nature, and by actual descent from them, so that they partake of their being. They are, if it may be said, an extension of the parents. The parent, therefore, is related to the child in some sense as to his own self.

Secondly, the family is made up thus of parents and children that are essentially connected ; and it has its own economy. It has a little kingdom of its own. It has its own aims. It undertakes to rear children to manhood, from weakness and ignorance to old age. It attempts to so subordinate and so harmonize its elements that each and every member shall attain to his greatest strength, and reap the greatest amount of happiness consistent with his condition. Therefore it has its rules and regulations ; it has its code of permissions and its code of things forbidden; it has its right and its wrong; it has its little commonwealth organized with laws, pains and penalties, and remunerations and rewards, seeking the common end and the common good of the whole.

In such a commonwealth there must needs be, and there is, subordination. All are not equal and alike. If there is subordination, there must be obedience; and if there is obedience, there must be the means of enforcing it.

In every family the government ranges from the lowest to the highest forms. That is, every parental government has in itself something of three kinds of government, as men of analysis look at it. Every family government has in it physical coercion. The child cannot do what it has a mind to. If it would run into the fire, the mother does not hesitate to employ the law of violence. If it would take poison instead of food, the father hinders it by physical strength. The children are to be fed, and clothed, and washed, and dressed. While yet they are in their infancy, they are to be cared for. In a thousand particulars the government of the family consists in the physical control of the children, as experience has

taught us that the great physical world in certain respects is governed.

But besides that, there is in the father and in the mother of every family, as looked up to by the child, a kind of magistracy. For the father and mother do not think of Thomas and James and William as though they were alone in the family. There is a brood of six or eight children, and the father and mother have a relation in common to them all, and they govern them with reference to the welfare of all in accordance with certain abstract considerations derived from experience; so that in some sense the father is a magistrate, and adjudicates, in each instance, not alone for the child with whom he is dealing, but indirectly for the other children. And yet, while he is using physical force and magisterial authority in the household, it is the persuasive influence and affection of the father that gives both of these their influence, and that sums up in itself the highest conception of government. The parental government, which is by name the government of the father over his children, includes in it physical power, magisterial power, and love power.

The distinctive peculiarity, then, of the government of the household, is, first, that it is personal. Even when rules and principles are employed, they are employed by a visible father and mother, and they are enforced by the sympathetic and vital presence of the parents.

Secondly, the father and mother and children are related to a common good, seeking it all together. Neither is sacrificed to the others. The father and mother are superior; and yet their superiority takes nothing from the children. It is the grand foundation of their hope and expectation. The sovereignty of the father and mother neither breaks the child's will nor stands in the way of the child's freedom; but in it the child learns to have a full use of itself, and to become free.

Thirdly, love is the overruling influence in every family government. It seeks the welfare of the children. All true fathers and mothers govern for the sake of the children, and not for the sake of the family. It is not that they have in mind the abstract ideal of the household, to which they sacrifice their children. Their idea is that the children are to be reared aright, and that any amount of thought, and pains, and care, and suffering that is necessary for the rearing of the children is to be expended.

Not only is this love the fountain of all influence, but it directs, modifies, limits, the administration of every single element of influence which is brought to bear for the welfare of the children.

This, as we read the household, is parental government. It is a

personal government; a government that proceeds from the principle of love; a complex government. Employing all influences, physical, magisterial and persuasional, from the lowest to the highest. We analyze government, we classify it, and say, "So much of it is physical, so much of it is persuasive or authoritative, and so much of it is automatic or involuntary; and in the sight of God, without doubt it includes all these elements, the highest combinations and developments of them being what we call the love government, or parental government—the government of a father.

This being stated, I remark, first, that a government of laws is entirely consistent with the parental and personal character of the Divine moral government.

The tide of discovery is setting so strong toward the methods by which God created and is controlling the world, that many drift into the idea that there is no other government in the world but one of law; that our whole duty consists in finding out, as fast as we can, just what are the laws of our condition, and that is as near to God as we can get. And now men are beginning to scout the idea of the existence of a personal God altogether. They are beginning to say, "God is nothing but the sum of creation. He is the All-things. He is the root and the seed both. The globe, in its frame-work, and motion, and distributive force and thinking-power, is God,"—and that is pantheism. Men, seeing that health depends upon compliance with the laws of health, and that happiness consists in compliance with the laws of a man's condition, relatively, are coming more and more to be thoughtful. They think that perhaps, after all, too great an emphasis has been laid upon the personality of God. But it seems to me that without the thought of personality there can be no true conception of God whatsoever; and that every man, out of the instincts of his own nature, when he is set free from an artificial philosophy, craves a personal administration. Laws infixed in matter are the expressions of divine will; and the administration of them is by the personal power of God, the invisible. And the fact of a retinue of laws does not exclude the administration of them by a personal God. It may be that everything in nature is under the cognition of God. For we find that we differ from the inferior animals in this: that we can take in complex relations; that we see a multitude of things at a time; that the perception of myriads of details is compatible with the perception of the generic whole. And the extension of this constitution, the knowledge of it, gives us the idea of a God who has power so transcendent that he can look upon every insect, and every bird, and every beast, and every single thing that exists on this

globe, and on all globes, as easily as a man can look upon the details of any complex whole.

Take a savage that only knows how to use simple instruments, such as a bow and an arrow, a hatchet and knife, and when you show him a complicated machine in which there is propulsion and yet restraint, in which there is balance and yet impulse, he is unable to comprehend it. He cannot grasp complexity in simplicity and unity; but to a man who has large culture, it is easily comprehensible. He is competent to take a million things to make one. And as you go up step by step among men, you find that according to human judgment that is the greatest man who has the largest power in this direction. You carry out that conception when you conceive of One who has such analytical power that all the details of creation are as plain to him as the different wheels of a watch are to the watchmaker.

"The government of natural law"—a phrase so much used in our time—does not, then, limit or exclude the idea of a personal government. As a father in the household is able to govern every one of the children personally, and yet have a wise consideration of law, as applied to the clothing, to the feeding, and to the restraining of the whole; as natural law is easily applied by the personal administration of the parent over the child; so, in the larger sphere, we can perceive that God may have a personal government of providence, employing natural law for the execution of his purposes toward his children.

I believe in the existence of laws, and I would encourage any efforts to search them out and bring them more accurately to our knowledge. I should, however, bewail any such belief in the existence of laws in nature as excluded the sense of a personal God who, through those laws and by them, maintained a personal relation to every man, and to his development and fate in the divine providence—a providence which works through laws. I should deplore anything which did away with the belief in a personal God who maintains his relation through and through the organization of nature, and can make it direct or general, as he pleases. The idea of a personal God includes the physical, the magisterial, and the personal element—and in this order. The lowest is the physical, the intermediate is the magisterial, and the highest is the personal.

We frequently meet such loose and careless expressions as this: "I do not believe in a God of force and cruelty; I believe that God is a Father"—meaning by that, moral indifference; meaning that God does not care what men do; that he is so good-natured that he makes no exact rules, and lays no commands upon his

children that are coercive or painful. And when I hear men talking thus, I say, at once, this is a paternal government which lays aside natural law. Natural law does not necessarily inhere in paternal government, and the idea that only good nature shall prevail in the divine government is far from correct. Anger, even, is not incompatible with God's character as a Father. It is well, sometimes, to get angry. A man who cannot get angry is like a stream that cannot overflow ; that is always turbid ; on which float logs, and sticks, and leaves, and dust, and dirt ; and which turns into quagmire. Sometimes indignation is as good as thunder. There are thunder-showers outside of a man ; and what is anger, in this higher sense of the term, but the electric impulse given to every part of a man's nature ? Love, without it, is as insipid as molasses! We need the fire, the impulse, the driving-force that belongs to indignation. Not a narrow, selfish kind of anger, not waspish irritation, not the lower forms of anger, but the large combativeness of the whole soul arraying itself against wrong and evil—that we need, whether it be in God or men.

Far be it from me to suppose that God is a vast pillowy Being, soft as feathers are, white as down is, and powerless as they. Energy, might, intensity of force, belong to our God, and may be consistent with the utmost lenity, and the utmost gentleness, and the utmost love. For love is not one thing ; it is the mother of all things. Love is that quiver which has a hundred arrows in it. Sometimes it acts by pleasure, and sometimes by pain ; sometimes by persuasion, and sometimes by coercion ; sometimes by command, and sometimes by invitation. Out of love come truth and justice, and out of love comes that coercive influence by which justice and truth shall be made to prevail in the world.

Let us not, therefore, preach God's Fatherhood as being a comprehensive title for inanity ; for a kind of half-asleep, smiling good-nature, by which men are allowed to do about what they please, and to do it as they please. That view is contradicted not only by the Word of God, but by every ideal through which we form a notion of fatherhood. You do not believe in men and women with such characters as some men attribute to God. The father and mother you look back to and revere, loved you, and you knew they loved you ; but they loved you so that they meant to make something of you, and whipped you as well as coaxed you. They sought your good, but they did not spare your cries. They sought by the application of government from the top to the bottom—by the co-operative use of the physical, the magisterial and the personal elements of fatherhood—to bring you to manhood.

Such is paternal government, I think, at large. The love of holiness, the love of truth, the love of purity, the love of love—these are the grand aims which God is pursuing in his great household, for their sake. He chastens whom he loves, and scourges every son whom he receives. No chastening for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. You do not enjoy pain when it is being laid on; but afterwards, it often affords you comfort, when you see what comes from its being laid on.

Thirdly, the personal element in God explains the difficulties which have been introduced into theology from the Scripture use of the terms "law," "king," "sovereign," etc. Men infer that if God is sovereign, he may do substantially that which all sovereigns do; and there have been introduced into theology, in the explanations of the suffering of Christ, of the atonement of Christ, and of the conditions of both, from the side of visible and monarchical governments, elements of reasoning which I hold to be not true, when we consider God as a personal Father. For men say, "As kings cannot govern their subjects except by the power of laws, so God cannot govern the universe except by the power of laws." I will not stop to carry out that line of thought, but will simply say that there is just this difference between sovereignty in God and sovereignty among men. Fatherhood is a perfect ideal of government, and we see it largely exhibited now and then, in small groups; but ten or twelve men are hardly enough to carry out perfect government, and apply physical, intellectual and social elements in their highest forms, and to their full extent.

Now, the state grows out of the family. First there is the tribe; then there is a collection of tribes; and then there is the state: and where a monarchy prevails, the head man is a chieftian or king, and the others are his subjects; and he governs them by laws, and not by his personal influence. In other words, the weakness of man is such that he has to build upon the next best thing to personality. He cannot employ the best expedient. The best is that which we see practiced where a man governs his child by all the varied forms of law, from the physical up to the moral, employing his personal power as a driving motive; but in a little time the multitude of a man's affairs is such that he cannot lend so much of his personal influence to those around him. A king is an abstraction to his subjects. The great majority of them never see him; and he never sees them. No king can see every one that is under him; and he has to resort to the next best thing. By reason of

that weakness which belongs to all men; not by reason of their strength and excellence, not because it is best abstractly, but because it is best under the circumstances, the king enforces government by law. He sits back, unseen, and governs by imperfect instruments. Such is human weakness that it is not permitted to any man, whether he be judge or king, to exercise his personal feelings. We say of a judge, "He should be colorless;" and of a king, "He should be colorless;" we say that no personal feeling should enter into their adjudication. This is the best conception of a human judge or king, but it is not the best conception of an ideal judge or king. The reason is that it is not safe to allow the human magistrate to bring his own judgment into adjudication, because he is so weak. He must govern by certain rules. This is the best he can do.

Human governments are, after all, but bungling affairs. The worst thing in this world, next to anarchy, is government. It is a machine without which men cannot very well live, and with which they have not been able to live very well. It is better than a herd of wolves and bears in the woods; but, after all, if you take an inventory of the injustice that has been perpetrated and the mischiefs that have taken place under law; if you take an inventory of all the sufferings which have come from the want of feeling in kings, sovereigns, governors, and judges, no books could hold them. Vast beyond all conception is the volume of suffering that has fallen out under the clumsy attempt to administer by law instead of by personal influence; but if a judge were so good, and everybody knew it, that his love would be wise, then everybody would say, "It is better to let him act according to his sense of right and wrong, and according to the impulses of his moral nature."

The worst of it is, that most men's feelings are frowy,—they are spoiled, and it is not safe to use them; it is far safer to use fixed laws. If they were larger and better, they would be more nearly safe. The next best thing is the family. Nothing is safer than the government of a father. So an absolute monarch would be the ideal of a perfect government, provided he knew more than everybody else, and was better than everybody else. To put goodness into every act of life would be the ideal of human government; and a human government whose every act is good would be a type of the divine government. Goodness represents fatherhood; and father is higher than king. Coercive laws are necessary, and must be employed; but coercive laws are lower than the personal presence of the governor. He includes in himself all the elements of right action, and brings them to bear by personal thought and feeling; and he is so unerring, so true, so accurate, always and forever,

that he never makes a mistake. Therefore the personal government of God stands infinitely above a magisterial or kingly government. A magisterial government may be useful and adapted to the wants of men; but when you associate the weakness of human governments with the divine government, and attempt to explain by it the unfolding of God's decrees, and to make the sufferings of Christ simple obeisance to law, as if a law were superior to a father or to God; when you make divine suffering a commercial equivalent—so much for so much; when you transfer the whole rattling machinery of earthly government to the council-chamber of heaven, and take from God the personality of his being, you deprive him of that fatherhood which is the chief attribute that makes him God. For he says, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy. I use law for restraint, where it is the best instrument by which I can reach my subjects; but law is my servant. It interprets my mind and will as far as it goes; but I have a mind and will that is not interpreted by law. I am better than the best expressions of goodness, purer than the best symbols of purity, and nobler than the best representations of nobility. I am not bound to give servile adhesion to any particular forms of law. Therefore I am free to have mercy on whom I will."

The highest form of government is paternal; and paternal government is personal. It is coercive, vindicatory, and even avenging at times, and therefore it is pain-inflicting; but it is distinctively and peculiarly a government that means good, and good to the very end. No blind philosophical ideal stands up in the presence of the Divine Being as something more beautiful, more excellent than the welfare of his subjects. There is nothing so important before God as mankind. The supreme purpose, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of the divine paternal government over men, is their welfare.

But does God not seek his own glory? That is his glory. What is the glory of a father but his children? What is the glory of a mother but her household? Who ever feels in his own achievements the same joy and elevation that he feels in learning that those who sprang from his loins, and whom he has, by care, by labor, and often by suffering, brought up to manhood, stand well equipped in life, and are honored by their fellow-men? Where is there any diadem that crowns a father's head as his children do? And what is there that God looks upon and sees to be more beautiful and glorious than the trooping millions that come from all worlds and and all periods of time, seeking the heavenly gate, and crying out, "Father! Father! Father!"

It is to this end that the divine personal government uses power,

punishment and reward, fear and hope. It is that they may work together for the good of all who belong to the household of God.

Here, then, is the true conception, to my mind, of the great doctrine of the moral government of God, and of paternal government. It is, to my mind, a true explanation of the government of God—a government that is full of resources, and that has forever guiding it and limiting it, directing it and impelling it, this great central soul, that seeks universal goodness and final happiness, and that discloses itself in society on earth, where not only by physical, social and magisterial law, but by fatherly, personal government, men are raised and prepared for a life of immortality.

A God who takes care of the universe because it will cause him to be praised, I cannot love. Christ taught me that selfishness is hateful; and I do not think it to be less hateful because it is infinite. If to live with all one's thought-power, with all one's executive force, with all one's influence in every sphere of life, in order to make one's self great, is hateful in men, it would be infinitely more hateful in God, because he is so much larger than men.

You may crown the devil by as many names as you please, I will not worship him. I will not worship cruelty nor vengeance; I will not worship self-adulation nor self-conceit; I will not worship mere power; but I will worship goodness, that carries with it self-respect, and authority, and government, and command, and threat, and execution; I will worship goodness, that, governing through long periods, and through many generations, is patient, and long-suffering, and abundant in mercy and goodness, seeking man's augmentation, purification, ennobling and immortality. That God whose name is Love; that God, if you choose to call him so, who is a consuming fire (for what consumes like the fire of love? what is so searching, so cleansing, so stimulating as that?); that God whose name is Power—power in love; that God whose name is Justice—the justice of love; that God whose name is above every name, and all names; that God who, when all the earth has presented its aspects, its symbols, its experiences, and these have been clustered into one great memorable name, is still the nameless God, standing in eternity, and saying, "I am what I am"—that God, by his grandeur, subdues my soul. Him I love. To him I yield up my personality, and to none other. May we all be so guided by right-living, by right-thinking, and by the providence and grace of this God who governs all for the good of all, that we, at last, shall rise through the mists and the mistakes, through the burdens and the troubles, through the errors and the sins of this mortal life, and see him as he is, and be like him.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

THOU dost not need our supplication—thou that causest the sun to rise and the seasons to come, and dost pour from the hand of bounty the ineffable blessings of life; thou that knowest what things we have need of before we ask, and art always doing exceeding abundantly more than we ask or think. It is for our sakes that thou hast commanded us to draw near and to ask. Thus thou dost make thy gifts more fruitful of good to us; thus thou teachest us gratitude for the things which we receive. Thou dost grant to our eye, to our ear, and to our hand infinite mercies, which teach us to live by faith, by hope, by love, by gratitude. We rejoice that thus we associate with thee all things which are most benign and most beautiful in life. All the things upon the earth which thou hast fashioned, do speak of thee to those who are instructed to hear what they say. All things work together for good to them that love thee, or interpret thy providence through love. We rejoice in thee; we rejoice in thy disclosures of thyself; and yet we know that we are standing afar off; that we are scarcely within the circuit; that we certainly cannot draw near. By searching we cannot find thee out nor understand thee to perfection. When we behold thee as thou art, thou wilt be infinitely more glorious, transcending the uttermost conception which we form of thee upon earth; for we are not only children, but very babes; and we scarcely understand at all the things which we look upon. For the eye cannot discern the things of God; nor can the heart comprehend them; and thou, God, canst not reveal them to us until thou dost transform us; until we are purged of the flesh; until we rise into the spirit-land, and see thee with new disclosures in ourselves, and with transcendent beauty in thyself. We rejoice though we are thus in the twilight, and believe that the dawn is coming, and that the full daylight shall be ours, and that we shall, though we may lose many a fancy and fable, find the Father to be more glorious than it enters into the heart of man to conceive. Thy justice, thy truth, thy fidelity, thine ineffable love, the glory of thy power, and the wisdom of thine administration—these we shall never understand in this life. Thy ways are past finding out here. They will spread and expand in new varieties, and with new developments, far beyond any that we have. Thou wilt shine forever and forever in transcendent glory.

Be pleased to so fashion us that when we pass from these mortal shores we may be counted worthy to stand near to thee, to behold thee, and to take, at least, thy light as our robe and our righteousness.

We pray, O Lord our God, that thou wilt prepare us for this translation by the cure of every fault, by the forgiveness and healing of every sin, and by leading us from the ways of selfishness, and undue pride, and vanity, into the ways of purity, of peace, of benevolence, of faith, of trust, of obedience in all things.

Wilt thou grant, this morning, to thy servants that are drawn hither, the blessing of thy presence and the communion of thy Spirit. May they have that spiritual influence resting upon them which shall stir up their life within them. May they feel that they are not far from God, and that he is drawing them near to him by his promises. May they now be able to open their innermost souls before thee. May they take the things which they desire for themselves or for others. May they have courage to confess their sins, and to resolve in the strength of God to overcome them. May they take hold by faith again upon the service of God, and seek in all ways to fulfill the mind and will of the Spirit.

We pray that thou wilt grant to those who are in despondency, and darkness, and sorrow, the comfort of thy presence. May thy rod and thy staff comfort them.

We pray that thou wilt grant a blessing to those who are burdened with care; who are distracted by the ways of the world; who are borne down by the duties that devolve upon them. May they, to-day, have rest in God. May their waning courage rise once more. May they be able to bear their cross wherever it is and whatever it is. May they feel that it is the hand of God that hath placed it upon them in their weakness, not to crush them, but to impart strength to them.

We pray that thou wilt help every one to carry his own sorrow. If it may not be removed, may there be grace to bear it. May thy grace be sufficient for every one.

Wilt thou grant to each soul that is in doubt and uncertainty such a measure of the revelation of God as shall be food, as shall be guidance, as shall give both strength and direction. We pray that thou wilt be with all those who are striving in a Christian life, but who, by reason of their own weakness, and by reason of the obscurity of the way, find themselves beclouded and drawn aside by numerous difficulties. May they not give up their hope. May they still hold fast to the faith of Christ Jesus. Though they may be weak and feeble; yea, though they may not be able themselves to go down into the waters that are stirred, still may they look up to thee and be consoled. Speak comfortable things to them, and cheer them, that they may renew their consecration. Though they fall a hundred times, may they rise again, and pursue their onward course.

We beseech of thee that thou wilt grant thy blessing to all the households that are represented here. Be pleased to quicken them; to strengthen them; to comfort them; to fill them with light and with joy.

We pray for the young, for those who are in the midst of life, and for those that are aged. We pray for strangers in a strange land. We pray for all those that are overthrown in their hope and expectation. We pray for all who are in despondency. We pray for those who do not pray for themselves. We pray for those who are cast out of our sympathies. We pray for those whom society rejects. We pray for the despoiled of every name. We pray for those who are overthrown by temptations and by sins. We beseech of thee that they may find a Rescuer, a Savior.

We ask thy blessing upon all those who to-day make known the truth to the ignorant; upon all that go forth to comfort those that are in affliction, to carry light to those that are in darkness, to visit the solitary, the imprisoned, or the sick. May all the children of mercy receive mercy at the hand of God, and be greatly comforted in their own souls, and be able, by the consolation wherewith they are comforted, to comfort also all those who are in afflictions.

We pray for the churches of Christ of every name, and for all that preach the Gospel. We beseech of thee that they may see eye to eye. We beseech of thee that heart may be responsive to heart; that divisions may cease; that envyings and jealousies may be done away; and that there may be more sympathy, more co-operation, and more pressing forward for good things under right motives. May the world, that hath so long beheld quarrels and contentions in thy church, see them rapidly come to an end. In this world, where hate hath been so sovereign, and hath so divided men, may we see love growing mightier, and bringing men together, and uniting them, and preparing them for that great and final work by which the earth is to be transformed, and by which the new heaven and the new earth shall come, in which are to dwell righteousness.

Hear us in these our petitions, and answer us for Christ Jesus' sake. *Amen.*

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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